

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135, Westborough, MA 01581

www.nhesp.org

Bristly Black Currant *Ribes lacustre*

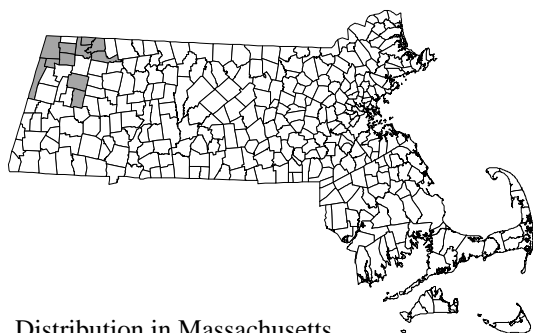
State Status: **Special Concern**

Federal Status: None

Description: Bristly black currant (*Ribes lacustre*) is a low, bristly to spiny, straggling shrub measuring up to 1 meter (3 feet) in height. Its leaves are alternate and are deeply cut with 3 to 5 lobes. Flowers are yellowish-green to pinkish, have fan-shaped to semicircular petal lobes, and are about 1/2 cm (less than 0.25 inches) in diameter. It is a northern plant of cool, moist forest slopes, usually in dappled shade.

Aids to identification: The bristly black currant is one of several members of the genus *Ribes* found in Massachusetts. A combination of characters must be used to distinguish it: 1) It has a "skunky" odor when the leaves, twigs, and fruits are crushed; 2) Its flowers and fruits are arranged in a raceme (which has a central stalk) and usually bears four or more flowers; 3) It has stipitate (stalked) glands on the ovaries of the flowers, and later on the (purple to black) fruits, giving them a "bristly" appearance; and 4) Its stems are armed with thin, bristly prickles, as its common name implies.

Similar species: It can be difficult to distinguish between species in the genus *Ribes* in the vegetative state; flowers and fruits make identification much simpler. Swamp red currant (*R. triste*) co-occurs with the bristly black currant at a few streamside locations; however, it has smooth, red fruits and unarmed stems. Smooth gooseberry (*R. hirtellum*) is similar to bristly black currant; however, the broken twigs and fruit do not have a foul odor, the fruits are not bristly, and leaves are never as deeply cut as those of *R. lacustre*. Skunk currant (*R. glandulosum*) may grow in the same places as bristly black currant, but has spineless stems.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1980-2006

Based on records in Natural Heritage Database



Ribes lacustre

Holmgren, N. 1998. The Illustrated Companion to Gleason and Cronquist's Manual. New York Botanical Garden.

Habitat: Bristly black currant is usually found in cool ravines and borders of swamps in upland regions of Massachusetts. It often occurs close to mountain streams, seepy ledges or in steep rocky ravines, but it is also found in high elevation swamps. The shrub prefers shaded to filtered light and wet soil, although one occurrence is in a mesic-dry region. It is found in association with northern hardwoods-hemlock forest. Surrounding vegetation may include yellow birch (*Betula allegheniensis*), red spruce (*Picea rubens*), American mountain-ash (*Sorbus americana*), striped maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*), and hobblebush (*Viburnum lantanoides*). Associated rare species are Braun's holly fern (*Polystichum braunii*) and hemlock parsley (*Conioselinum chinense*).

Population status in Massachusetts: The bristly black currant is a species of Special Concern in Massachusetts. It is rare here in the Commonwealth because it is a cool-climate plant with limited appropriate areas of moist, montane habitat. There are 21 current stations and 4 historical stations (not documented within the past 25 years), all concentrated in northwestern Massachusetts in areas of relatively high elevation or high latitude, or both. As with all species listed in Massachusetts, individuals of the species are protected from take (picking, collecting, killing) or sale under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act

Range: Bristly black currant is found from Labrador to Alaska, south to the mountains of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Minnesota, and California.

Threats: Drastic alterations to the habitat supporting the bristly black currant could threaten populations. Large-scale logging, conversion of forest to developed land use, or alterations to stream or swamp hydrology could negatively impact habitat conditions for this species by altering its cool, moist and shaded character. The invasive species multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) and barberry (*Berberis* sp.) have been documented at one station, and may out-compete the bristly black currant. Direct impact to individual plants of bristly black currant could occur from off-trail hiker trampling or trail-widening activities.

Management Recommendations: As with most rare plants, exact needs for management of bristly black currant are not known. The following advice comes from observations of the populations in Massachusetts. Excessive off-trail foot traffic on steep, unstable slopes may cause erosion, or may damage populations through direct trampling; hikers should be strongly encouraged to stay on trails near populations of bristly black currant. Any future trail construction should take into account locations of this rare species to avoid direct impacts. Forestry activities should be avoided or very carefully planned and executed in areas near bristly black currant, since drastic canopy opening could alter the cool, moist nature of its habitat and open areas up to early-successional competitors. Alterations to stream and swamp hydrology should be carefully avoided, since this species usually does not tolerate dry conditions. Stations for bristly black currant should be monitored for invasive exotic species such as barberry (*Berberis* spp.) which can also thrive in cool, moist forest conditions; if found, invasive species should be controlled.

Flowers or Fruit Present

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Originated: 2006